

## CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF THE 1930S

By Maxine Daniels Tosch (B. 8/25/24)

I wrote this during my younger years – like in my 60s. Today I am rewriting it on my computer. I will be 79 this year. This is 2/1/2003

My mother has remarried and this is where this chapter of my life begins. My sister, June LaVonne & my brother James Harrison, Jr. (known as Gregg) and myself Beryl Maxine are the children of Lyla Clarafred Gregg & James Harrison Daniels. Our stepfather Harlan McKinley Alt is the true father I didn't have in Harrison Daniels. He lovingly assumed the responsibility of helping mother raise us during some very trying times. Five years later in 1938 mother gave birth to Harlan's first & only child, our brother, John Harlan Alt. We adored him. Now on with my story!

When mom married Harlan, August 11, 1933, he inherited 3 rebel kids. Before mother's & my dad's divorce was completed we 3 kids had to be placed in a Juvenile Home because my dad had run away with us during one of his visits at my Grandmother Haney's home. (Mother's mom) He told us we were going on a long trip. We ended our trip in Poplar Bluff, Missouri. One of his cousins (Aunt Sarah & her husband Uncle Dee Barnes) agreed to keep us. Mother didn't know where we were. My dad was not about to tell her either. We were in Missouri missing our mom at least 3 months until mom came with the sheriff to pick us up. Mrs. Evans, mom's social worker told mom we'd be better off in the juvenile home until their divorce was final. At least we kids would have security. I think we were there one year. Mother had to provide a husband & a home for us children in order for us kids to be released from the juvenile home. Her earnings were from hours of running a small eatery called "The Spotlight" located in the business district. She offered coffee & breakfasts of various types and Lunch she offered soups & sandwiches, desserts, etc. That's where she met Harlan. After his divorce my dad, Harrison, moved to Arizona.

I have to admit I was the worst rebel of we 3 youngsters. I was just 9, June 7, & Gregg 5. We had been pushed & pulled too much in our younger years. Being the eldest


child I was responsible for the others while my parents were working & away from us. Relatives played our babysitters much of the time. It took Harlan a few years to build a loving family structure with us. He was a patient man. We kids had a lot to learn. We had very few responsible people to show us by their own examples what was expected of us. Mostly we were shoved from pillar to post, like Chinese checkers, to the relative of that day who would care for us. Most of the time we were on our own. The juvenile home we finally ended in had numerous lonely kids with no hope of ever receiving a family to love them. We kids yearned to be free of being confined there & longed to be with our own loving family. How would we recognize one since we didn't have one as we were growing up? Mother adored us but she had to work running her place of business each day for long hours. She had the responsibility of paying for the divorce & providing security for us. (Like finding a husband & a home before we would be released in her care from that juvenile home.) This is the background of what we children had experienced prior to the marriage of mother & Harlan, August 11, 1933.

Harlan had an interesting background. He was 38 when he married Lyla, our mom. His first wife Hazel Allen Alt had been a schoolteacher & loved her career. She did not want children but became pregnant. Unfortunately she & the baby both died during childbirth. Thus leaving Pop a widower. She was in her mid-30s. Harlan was ready for a family. Lyla, our mom, was 27 & Pop 38 when married.

Harlan did not press the issue of us calling him dad. He said Harlan was OK. We had started that way before they married & were just friends. Our dad, Harrison, was still our dad & in our minds. We complied. Not until we were adults did we change. It took my late husband Paul to shame us into calling Harlan, Pop. Paul said he raised you 3 kids & you should honor him. I was in my 20s then. From hereon Harlan is Pop.

Pop owned a farm home. Since his wife, Hazel, had passed away, he was renting it. We had to wait one year before moving into it. The home we moved into after leaving the juvenile home was one they rented in Iowa City. When we finally moved to the farm we discovered it was 'wanting'! It was falling apart. Little by little we worked

on it. Mother loved to be creative. She painted & wallpapered often. It seemed like each spring. The 1930s were Depression times. No one owned much to brag about. We became a team working together to provide plenty of food for us during the winter & lean days. We moved to this little town, 8 miles north of Iowa City,( where the State University of Iowa is located,) to North Liberty. Early homesteaders settled this area. Today it has grown tremendously. Then, North Liberty was a quiet, sleepy town with farm retirees settling there. It had one or two grocery stores, gas station, a roadhouse, churches, etc., and a population less than 500. In 2003, over 3,000 people live in North Liberty.

Once moved into our farm home we 3 had to go to school. We were lucky that one cornfield away was our one-room country schoolhouse. We earlier had attended public school with many children while in the City. Our new teacher set us back one grade each due to our troubled lives. I started in 4<sup>th</sup> grade (by repeating it). June & Gregg were left back also. From surrounding & some distant farms, our Penn Twp. #3 school was supplied with these students. Charles, Aileen, Mary Ann,  Gregg Daniels, Charles & Billy Lee Colony & Carolyn Colony, John, Mary Evelyn, & Melva Jeanne Colony, Frank & Marion Colony, Dean & Shirley Cogan & Margaret Novak, After I graduated from 8<sup>th</sup> grade others arrived. Our first teacher was young. Can't remember her name. My prominent memories of one special teacher came later on (perhaps the following year). She was this elderly, fat, short lady, Mrs. Melva Main. She had to be in her late 60s or 70s. Women looked older during those years compared to modern women. She must have weighed in at 250 pounds. She had a commanding spirit. We students knew we had to listen ~ or else! We knew who was the boss! Lucky she was strong because she had to handle fresh others and me.

Our 1-room schoolhouse could be seen during the fall and winter months when the cornfields were cut down & harvested. At that time, we could see from our kitchen windows our teacher, Mrs. Main, standing on the porch ringing the 9 o'clock a.m. School bell. We 3 would wait until the last minute to leave home. When that bell rang we ran to school. Others came from distances and arrived much earlier to play on the



school grounds. We were lucky to live close by. Iowa winters can be rough since Iowa, in our area, Johnson County, is mainly plain lands. Snow can really pile up & drifts were deep. We kids loved the snow & the sports it provided.

Mother raised leghorn chickens. One mean old rooster would wait outside our kitchen door. When we would race to school those mornings he would be racing right along trying to peck our legs. He hurt us many times. His target mainly was me. Mom decided he had done this one too many times & she put him in her soup pot. Once we were enlightened about him being there not one of us could eat the soup or meat. It was tossed out. He certainly had 'one hellava' personality!!!" Our dog Snoopy appreciated a great chicken dinner, even so! To date we still have our memories of him!

Winters were harsh. Early on, our first heating stove was pot bellied. Back then there was no central heating. This stove was placed in the center of the living room where we would all sit around it warming ourselves. Our house wasn't insulated & it was drafty. Pop would place tarpaper around the outside walls to help keep out those drafts. Our farm home then was over 100 years old & is still standing today. Icing glass covered all the windows too. That living room stove did not heat the two upstairs bedrooms nor the bedroom downstairs & other rooms in that area.

Some mornings after sleeping in these rooms with no heat our windows were iced over. We slept in a featherbed with warm wool blankets covering us. Mom would heat flat irons we used for ironing. She would wrap them in towels & then placed them at our feet as we slept. June & I shared a double bed. Gregg had a room of his own. Occasionally he would wet his bed. I can imagine he froze after that. He didn't complain. Now we know that he could have had diabetes at a very young age & that caused his problem. He died at age 70 with diabetes complications in 1998. When we could afford it we purchased a larger oil heater that warmed our home better.

Our kitchen was long & narrow with numerous sunny windows. We had a pump over the sink for drawing water. Mother had a huge cook stove there with a reservoir



holding hot water for washing our dishes & for other uses. Behind it would be a wood chest full of corn cobs, paper & wood for keeping it burning at all hours, helping the other heater to keep our rooms warm.

Mother was always cooking or baking. We had two Jersey cows we milked. Mom would have plenty of milk & cream to work with. She always had sitting on the warm areas of 'old Betsey' our cook stove, milk simmering away to make cottage cheese. When ready the whey was drained & the curds placed in a piece of cheesecloth to hang until the liquid drained from it. We enjoyed eating the cottage cheese. Mom & whoever was available to work, churned our cream, making butter. She also had pork rind (fatback) cooking on the back of our big cook stove. When it finally cooked down the rinds became 'chit lings', much like potato chips of today, bit different. Fridays mother would splurge & bake several loaves of bread, also cloverleaf rolls, cinnamon buns, etc. During depression years this was truly a treat. Those cinnamon buns, & homemade bread with homemade butter, jams & jellies soothed our hungry tummies after school. Sticky buns were part of those treats. We 3 kids raced home from school knowing what was waiting for us to enjoy. Mother enjoyed making pies, cakes, cookies & breads for us. Each year we would can several quarts of vegetables for winter eating. Mother raised her own leghorn chickens for meat. Most of the time we ate well compared to others who lived during the depression. We had our own eggs, also. It was teamwork done by each of us that provided our food all year. Of course when we were young, mom was looking after our home & us. Pop was our other provider.

As I mentioned earlier, mom often redecorated our old farmhouse. She even mixed her own paints for the shades of paint she needed for her walls...often soft & lovely. Those old plaster walls had broken & chips had fallen out upstairs. This didn't bother her. She would take a large piece of cheesecloth, dip it in glue, & paste it over those huge holes. Next we would wallpaper that area. Who would know! She had great decorating taste. Probably her glue was flour & water.

We couldn't afford to repurchase our Congoleum rugs. The paint was worn from it after years of walking on the floors. She would start her stippling job to brighten our floors. Mom would paint a basic shade of battleship gray on the worn linoleum rug. Once dry, then each day later, she would stipple a different color on the floor. She used red, yellow & blue paint.

She used newspapers, dipped daily into a different color. She would paint red the first day, let it dry blue the next, etc. Once done it was beautiful. This was done during the summer months so we kids would stay out of doors while she was creating. Her hard work would have lasted longer had she varnished her floor, too. She painted different old pieces of furniture with bright colors to cheer up our home. What once was battleship gray Congoleum, now was gracing lovely shades of red, blue & yellow designs. The cost was minimal. Her efforts brought us joy!

Another hobby of hers was sewing. She made her own curtains & other decorations for our home. She sewed our dresses on her Singer treadle sewing machine. I was her pink child & June her blue. At least it seemed that way because those shades she used on us. All year we would be making our Christmas gifts during our free time. Sitting in the corner of the living room was a loom with a black velvet decorative pillow cover stretched across it. This was for punch work. We each took turns creating a kitten head with angora yarn in white. The folks saw to it we were kept busy. June & I embroidered kitchen towels all year long for the relatives. Mom bleached her flour sacks & pressed designs on them (Monday is for washing, Tuesday is for ironing, etc.) We had no television to watch. We listened to our programs on radio after school. During those hours we could be creative while we sat and listened to our favorite kid shows.

Our Christmases were always fun. Pop would take the three of us into the fields to cut down one special Christmas tree. We found it in the woods. Pop would drag it home with the 3 of us chattering away with him in anticipation of setting it up and decorating it.

During early Depression, money was at a premium for buying decorations. Mother, so creative, purchased tiny, cheap cans of paint in Christmas colors (gold, silver, pink & blue). She made her own decorations from walnut shells by painting them & gluing ribbons on each. She used colorful items from nature & created other items of her own. We kids strung popcorn & cranberries on a string & draped them around our Christmas tree. The folks had had candleholders of miniature size. Candles were placed in them & hung on the tree. We lit the candles only when we were all watching carefully to see not one would start a fire. Our last decoration was the tinsel. Our tree was lovely. We three made our own gifts for each other & mom & pop. Christmas, even with sparse gifts, was a joy.

Pop enjoyed Christmas as much as we kids & mom. He would get into the kitchen & start making candies for the holiday. He would make fudge, divinity & toffee. Mother would make Christmas cookies. We would box them & deliver them to those less fortunate than us. Mother sewed dresses for some neighbor girls so they would have something extra for the holiday. We were team players. Our folks were great example setters here.

One Christmas June and I were especially thrilled to find under our tree our dolls all dressed in new doll clothing—a new wardrobe. Mother had made wigs for our dolls from her own long, black curly hair. She took a piece of fur to make fur coats for each doll. Another year we found a handmade table and benches, our size, with doll dishes setup on the table for us to enjoy. We were thrilled. Mom & Pop had made that set. Financially we weren't rich but we had riches other families would envy—our love for one another that didn't come easy. It took years for us 3 kids to adjust to our new life in the country with our new relatives & friends. It was like beginning all over again. Eventually Pop, Mom & his family made young ladies & gentlemen of us. Their mission was tough! Little baby John's birth in 1938 united us. June called him 'Johnny Uniteus'! He brought much love to our family.



Spring was always welcomed after such long, arduous cold, windy, snowy winters. As soon as the ground dried from the snow & rains, Pop would go borrow his dad's team of horses to plough our acre of land near our house. . His dad Rollie & mom Emma Stewart Alt lived 2 miles north of us. It was easy getting there by car but was a long walk. Pop would knock over our outhouse & take the sludge from it, plus use cow & horse manure from Grandpa's farm, to enrich our soil & then would plow the fertilizer underground. The soil needed good fertilizer to grow our great crops. All year long mom would throw potato peels & other vegetable residue into the garden to enrich the soil.

We planted our seeds & seedlings crops of vegetables. Some of these being corn, peas, cabbage, lettuce, okra, cucumbers, carrots, spinach, Swiss chard, onions & scallions, turnips, etc. This took hours of work. We made rows & rows of vegetables & long. Once crops began to grow, we 3 kids had to go out during our summer vacation days to thin the tiny vegetable seedlings out & to weed each long row. Mother paid each of us an allowance for our hard work. It was just 20 cents apiece. Half of it paid for a Saturday afternoon at the movies & the other half for a large bag of candy kisses to eat while in our favorite movie. I enjoyed helping Pop plant hills of potatoes. Mother would check them often, as they grew, for small baby potatoes to cook during the summer while we were waiting for them to mature. While we were in the movies our mom would do her weekly shopping in Iowa City. She would let us stay through that same movie a second time. Show was over at 6:00 p.m. She would be there to pick us up to go home. In the meantime she may have visited a relative or friend in the city.

Before vegetable harvest time our family would go to Pop's family to harvest blackberries & raspberries during the summer months. Our whole family carried one-gallon cans on our arms but had a larger pail for each of us to dump our berries in once the one gallon buckets were filled. We picked our goodies in Grandpa & Grandma Alt's property, way back in the woods. They were generous to help us & we appreciated this gift from them.

We had to watch for rattlesnakes. Thus, we wore high top boots. We also picked gooseberries. Mother would can these berries & during our winter months she would make pies for our desserts.

When my grandparents lived on the hill in their family's old homestead they had an orchard. There we would pick apples, pears & plums. They also had walnut trees. We came home with pails of fruit & nuts during the harvest seasons. Early on, we had cherry trees in our front yard, but cut them down eventually. Mother processed all of these goodies for eating enjoyment later. We even had beehives near our outhouse. We collected honey from them. Pop would discover a hive in an old rotted tree & climb it. The hives would be brought home. We surely enjoyed the honey. What kid doesn't enjoy sweets!

My folks had a root cellar instead of a basement. Here we placed our canned food, our fresh fruit & vegetables in bins. We had to check them out during the fall to see that no rotten fruits or vegetable would destroy the remainder of our stored food. Pop would make 5-gallon crocks of sauerkraut made from heads of cabbages. Crocks would be in the root cellar fermenting for weeks until ripe. Mother canned dill pickles & they were in there. We also made our own root beer & were not to drink it until much later. Aunt Alyce & Uncle Joe Rohlena provided us with grapes & we made grape juice for drinks later. Temperatures in our root cellar were excellent for us to maintain our foods. In those days we didn't have refrigerators, or electricity. We had only iceboxes. Our root cellar was most important to us to conserve our harvested & canned foods. Each year we harvested & canned 500 quarts of fruits and vegetables. It was tough work!

Harvest time was usually all summer for different fruits & vegetables. August & September were the work months. Our team, our family, picked all those vegetables we planted earlier & would prepare them for canning. No easy job! We snapped peas, cut up snap green beans, diced cabbage & carrots, cut kernels of corn from her husks, etc, etc. Then mother processed them for canning.

Here is another cute story about my inadequacies. It was cucumber-harvesting time. Mother wanted to make a crock of dill pickles this fine summer day. We had a well outside our home, which we used often. She called from inside & said, "Makey take this five gallon crock to the well & pump it full of water. Then add this bag of coarse salt. Place this egg into the brine. If it rises to the top of the water then I will know the brine is ready for my dill pickles."

I did just what she told me. I pumped the 5 gallon crock full of well water, then added the salt, broke the egg into the water, waiting for the egg to rise to the top of the brine. It didn't happen! My patience was wearing thin. I called out to mom, "Mom the egg is not floating on top of the brine!" She came running out of the house, observed what I did & she broke into hilarious laughter saying, "You silly goose, you broke the egg into the brine instead of leaving it whole to float on top of it!" We had to dump the water & start again. I probably had seen that done dozens of times before. It just never registered. That's a lesson I have not forgotten. Mother loved to tell great stories of my mistakes. She had fun with this one for years. I truly can't blame her!

Summers we children had to finish our chores before we were able to walk long distances to visit our neighbors who had children near our ages. We went there to play. Mom always saw to it that each of us 3 would bring along a one-gallon bucket. While we were out in the fields or woods & we saw a gooseberry bush full of berries we had to stop our playtime & pick those wild berries. We kids played the whole day & as dusk was beginning to descend on us we realized our orders. We hastily worked hard to fill our buckets before leaving for home. Our friends' mother requested the same from her 4 kids. Gooseberries were plentiful then. We had to fulfill our promises to our mothers.

With the arrival of the fall months then it was time for the farmers to collect their crops. A few farmers who were neighbors joined forces & helped one another thresh. In the 1930s this was a fun time. Women & girls gathered together to prepare big meals for the threshers when they finished their job. The women would prepare the best foods. They prepared several types of meat on that special day. They had delicious casserole



dishes to delight anyone. All types of breads, rolls, & home made butter, jams & jellies. Best of all for kids were the delightful, scrumptious pies & cakes of all types to scoff down. Grandma had a large kitchen. Twenty-five persons could easily sit at one bountiful table of goodies.

The threshers' were full of dust & dirt from their day's work. Grandma had a large water basin with warm water and soap setting on a table for the men to wash up. A mirror was above it. They would each clean up outside before they would go inside to sit down to eat. After a lengthy meal & good eats & great talk they were back outside again finishing their job. I was one of the kids who would have to run to the garden to get fresh peas, green beans, cabbage, etc. Then I had to prepare them for the ladies to cook. Good memories – a wonderful experience both inside & outside working with the threshers.

Over 70 years ago we were expecting Grandmother Ida Daniels out to our farm for a squab dinner. A squab is a junior pigeon. Our barn was once called the Old Dutch Reformed Church & our home was once the parsonage. This is in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was old & decrepit but we still used it to house our hay & our animals. Above the rafters, & on the barn's sidewalls were nests of baby pigeons. Surrounding our barn were cornfields full of food for pigeons. Since we weren't using that portion of the barn (the upper ceiling) they decided to take over & nest. . When anyone special arrived at our home we went out into the barn & would steal those baby squabs.

Pop & Gregg would take their flashlights & shine the glow of their lights into the mother pigeon's eyes. She would get flustered & fly off her nest. June 's & my jobs were to climb up those wooden ladder steps that Pop had nailed onto the barn walls. We would only take those largest squabs. Later on Pop would kill them I would take off their feathers. Then help mom prepare them for the oven. Squabs you cook whole since they are small eating.

I guess I wasn't paying attention to what I was doing. Mom gave me the gizzards to clean. I forgot to clean one. The gizzards were baked with the squabs. Wouldn't you

know, my grandmother was served my mistake! Grandma was no shrinking violet & let out a roar, "Who didn't clean this gizzard???!!!" Both mom & I were embarrassed. I was blamed. Mom wouldn't let me live that one down for years, either. Even Grandma let me have it with her remembrances, once in awhile! Now they are mine & I cherish them. She died in 1967.

Another experience we had. Country living is lonely. Mother had hundreds of leghorn chickens running around everywhere in our yard. No one lived nearby so it was OK to let him or her roam free. We were next to a country road where our neighbors would drive past & occasionally strangers. The road quiet most of the time.

One summer day a knock came at our door and once opened, a gypsy woman offered to tell mom's fortune if she would provide food for her starving family. There was a caravan of black Cadillac's, one behind the other, sitting on the country road with men, women & children in them. Mother was a bit frightened. The gypsy woman was dressed in bright colors, necklaces dangling from her neck, bracelets up her arms, & rings on each finger. Her long skirt was full of rickrack of all colors along the hem. Her midriff was bare. Her hair covered with a bandana & large hoop earrings dangling from her ears. This could present a problem for mom.

While she was diverting mom's attention I looked out our window & saw those gypsy men rounding up some of our chickens Mother gypsy was asking for milk & food to feed her babies. Mom generously helped her but in the meantime her family was helping themselves to our belongings. I only remember that incident because it's a rare day when a gypsy caravan of folks shows up on the back roads of an Iowa farm. They knew what they were doing!

We had an old fashioned telephone on our living room wall. To reach your destination you had to ring the operator. For years our Aunt Agda Alt was the town's chief telephone operator. Our ring when receiving calls was 2 long rings and one short one. Aunt Hazel Alt Bowman first had the job & turned it over to Agda.

When our phone rang it may not be ours, but a neighbor's familiar ring. Most nosey neighbors would pick up the phone to listen in on their conversation. Sometimes one would learn juicy gossip. That was in the 1930s. Not much excitement during our long Iowa winters.

Iowa City theaters used as a drawing card to get families to bring their children to the movies a promise of a free movie. The catch. Each child must bring a small wrapped gift for some poor child at Christmas. We each bought a cheap toy, wrapped it in Christmas paper & were prepared to go to & enjoy our free movie. I loved it when Shirley Temple was playing. We all adored her when we were young. Tom Mix, Gene Autrey, etc. were favorites!

Like Christmas, Easter was great fun for us children. Our folks celebrated at home with us & when we went to grandmas then Agda & Joe celebrated with us. Agda was newly married to Joe. She colored real Easter eggs and hid them in the hens' nests in the henhouse outdoors or in the barn or barnyard. We 3 kids had to hustle to find them. They didn't make it easy. Agda & Joe created a lot of fun for us. At home Pop enjoyed hiding hens eggs, too, that had been colored. He also hid money in our shoes with our eggs. We got so excited when we found a ten-cent piece. Money was scarce. A dime was valuable & bought much back then.

This is my earliest childhood remembrance. It happened before mother & my dad Harrison divorced. Near our home was a 5 & 10-cent store. I could walk from home over the metal bridge to the store. Below the bridge was the Iowa River. I was 5 years old. As I was looking at the goodies the store offered, I took a shine to a cute, small pencil sharpener looking like a 1930s car. I wanted that. I was alone & no one was there to scold me or to hold me back. In my innocence I picked it up & brought it home with me. Mother immediately asked me where I had gotten it. When she heard from me I had picked it up from the dime store she was livid with rage. She lectured to me it wasn't mine to have. She grabbed me by my arm & trotted me right back to the 5 & 10-cent store. She made me apologize to the clerk as I handed the car over to her. I was



humiliated & ashamed! That was a lesson for all time. Since, I have not coveted another's belongings.

As for that bridge this is another remembrance. As a small child I was scared out of my wits walking over it. One day when I was walking I discovered that one of the wooden planks were missing. I was terrified to stretch my short legs across that blank span to the next plank, feeling I might fall into the fast, running Iowa River below. I just sat there and cried my heart out until some adult came along and assisted me. I went straight home.

Often we were invited to Grandma & Grandpa Alt's home to share dinner with them and other parts of the family. Usually it would be Aunt Hazel & Uncle Robert Bowman & their 2 children, Ethel & Lloyd. Ethel & I were one year and one day apart in age. She was older than I. Aunt Hazel was hers & Lloyd's stepmother. Their mom had died. Aunt Hazel was a spinster of over 40 years when she married Robert. To date Ethel & I are great friends. She lives in Iowa where she has always lived & I am here in New Jersey. We are computer pals. We keep in touch!!

I haven't mentioned Max Everett. He was grandma Alt's last child & was born a mongoloid. He was an adult while we kids were growing up, yet, he responded to all of us, mentally as a 3 or 4 year old child.. Grandma adored him & spoiled him. When grandpa Alt was alive he made him work. He had to help around the farm. He was fat & lazy & didn't want to do it but knew he had to. His responsibility was to fill the fuel bin with corncobs so the women could use the stove for heat & for cooking. When grandfather passed away Max would not obey. Agda & Joe were caring for grandma & Max. Grandma was too old. Agda & Joe kept him a long time after grandma's death but finally he had to be placed in the county home where he lived to the age of 60. That's a long life for a mongoloid. Grandma lived to be 94.

Gregg & Marion Colony ran trap lines along our creeks & elsewhere where wild animals lived. They would check their lines each day. They would kill their prey & skin

them later. Dry the skins & sell them for 50 cents each, (a lucrative business). One school day, before school began, Gregg checked his trap lines & encountered an angry skunk. You can imagine the rest. The skunk didn't miss!

Gregg went to school with that foul odor reeking on his body. (In those days we didn't have a clue that tomato juice would help wash off that odor). Mrs. Main grounded him from school until he could return smelling fresh again. He was happy because he was home for a few days. This was vacation time to him!

Here are fragments of one-room school memories. Early on, Mrs. Main wanted to break our bad habits of saying 'ain't'! She drew a paper bucket of paint, with a pocket, & placed it on the back wall & waited for one of us to say that word! After finding myself in her bucket-of-paint once too often I finally broke myself of that bad habit!! Being the oldest kid in school & the last to recite my lessons, Mrs. Main would recognize my few artistic talents & have me create decorations for our school day or other times: family gatherings, etc. Cleaning the blackboard was fun. She usually sent me to the library bookcase to read the encyclopedias. I enjoyed reading. I could be a terror throwing spit balls by being bored waiting to recite. She had me figured. I learned plenty by reading those books.

Mother was hung up on us 3 kids getting a good education. She was unable to go to high school as a girl due to living 5 miles from high school & too many children in the family. She finished 8<sup>th</sup> grade. A tutor taught her and a few other girls high school material since they lived far from school she taught them near home.

Her indulgences were to borrow as many free library books she could each week. We were library fans. When young we went to story hour in the children's division. At home mother read aloud to us when young. She was great at reading us Negro dialect. I still have some of her poems floating around here by Paul Dunbar, a Negro writer. I can remember sitting under a big old tree near the woodshed while she read. The tree is long gone – memories of her are still vivid!! Mom always wanted one of us to become a writer

She wrote poetry herself. ~ John Alt, her youngest, is the closest to that talent! He has his Doctorate degree & teaches college in Georgia. . John's degree is in English Literature. Not quite sure what it covers. Mother's influence didn't fall far from this branch either, nor Junes.' I enjoy writing myself. Now that I am computer literate I find expressing myself fun! I, myself, love to read & it's all from mom's early life influences .on me!

Prior to 1939 we had no electricity. We read & studied by kerosene lamps. Pop & mom had a gas lantern hanging from our living room ceiling, which would glow brightly prior to going to bed. It would soon run out of fuel. Our habit of going to bed at 9 p.m. was due to that & school the next day. Often I had to study upstairs, with my lamp near my bed, my homework for the next day.

When electricity arrived in 1939 we bought an electric radio instead of the battery-operated radio we had had earlier. When we children arrived home from school we were allowed to listen to our favorite children's radio programs like the The Lone Ranger, Jack Armstrong, etc. Evening family programs were fun. Fibber McGee & Molly, Burns & Allen, Baby Snooks, Stella Dallas (mom's favorite) Orphan Annie & many more I don't recall now.

In the kitchen mom would be popping popcorn in the big black fry pan. The fragrance was delightful. We waited in anticipation for mom to bring in each of us one of those big bowls of popcorn with butter & salt splashed into it. Yum! Mom & that big old cook stove popping corn in her fry pan, I cannot forget! She was a great friend & mom!!! Electricity brought us out of the dark ages. REA (rural electrification authority) took its sweet time to bring electricity to Iowa. To us this was opening a whole new world!

Pop would be considered a gentleman farmer. He had electrical skills learned when he was a sailor during WW 1. He was on the USS Constitution. They trained him to be a skilled electrician. He loved that job. Iowa city was getting electricity before we



in the country. A contractor name, Mr. Moffitt, hired pop to wire many of the new homes he built & was building there. So Pop was getting work. He wired churches & wherever electricity was needed Pop was there. Eventually after 1939 he wired most of the farm homes in our area. He was well liked & the Alts' well known in that community.

As soon as I got big enough to learn how to milk cows I was taught by him. Wherever I was needed while he was gone elsewhere, I was taught. Feeding the chickens, cows, ducks, etc. Mom usually took care of that. I was her backup. Mother had customers from Iowa City who would come to our home to buy her fresh killed young leghorn pullets.. Our job was to do the killing & the removing of the feathers. Mom's was to remove the pinfeathers & to butcher them, in time for her customers. We had hundreds of chickens we raised & attended to. Sometimes we got up in early morning before Pop went off to work & I off to school to prepare those chickens. By then I had milked the cows. Farmers' lives start early morning. Those poor cows must have really suffered with me. My skinny fingers pulled at their teats for milk. That barn was drafty. I wasn't great at protecting the cows either. Their dung should have been cleaned each day to protect them from laying in it. I waited for Pop to do this dirty job! At the end of the week he would do it!

Those Jerseys' were great gals!!! They produced plenty of milk, cream, butter & cottage cheese for us! Even before I had to catch the train (interurban between Cedar Rapids & Iowa City to high school) I had my chores & schoolwork done & ready to go! Pop, Mom & I worked together. I was a willing & strong helper & did not give them much lip. I started that way but mellowed along my route in life. I knew I was wanted & needed!

The year 1936 Agda & Joe Alt were married. Neighbors from North Libery & about wanted to hold a chivaree for them. I hadn't heard of one. My recollection was watching all these Model T Fords driving up the country road to Grandpa & Grandma Alts homestead. They parked in a location down the hill where the young folks couldn't

see them. Being curious I walked down to see dozens of cars waiting for sunset. The object of their chivaree was to bang on any type of noisy pan or metal to bring the newlyweds out for a speech. We made noises for ages & finally Joe & Agda came out & were greeted by the chivaree leader, & crowd. The newlyweds spoke & then a collection of money was taken. The group went home happy! Later on we had an oyster soup dinner with all sorts of goodies & a wedding shower with gifts for them.

Agda & Joe had no family then. They were creative & full of ideas for country folks. Often they would hold wiener roasts deep in their woods. We would ride back by horse & wagon. Sometimes on the way we had a scavenger hunt. The game was set up so on paper you would receive hints as to where the horses should turn to find a certain article. It was a merry time! Prior to our arriving Joe had already started the bonfire. He had stacked twigs, extra wood, etc. for the fire. Once the party started he would cut us a keen stick from a young tree sharpen its point? Once done, we kids would put our hot dogs on these sticks & would roast them. Later it would be marshmallows. Joe would throw potatoes into the fire to eat later. Such enjoyable times—so innocent!

Our entertainment would be someone playing & singing on a guitar or someone giving a reading. Joe had two schoolteacher cousins who joined us once & did that. We played games. A wonderful time had by all!

Our 4<sup>th</sup> of Julys' were wonderful. The whole town of North Liberty it seemed, headed for the Iowa City Park to see the fireworks. Families would sit on the green grass banks on a blanket and would enjoy a delightful evening. Cars were lined up for miles along the highway. Iowa City & our town plus folks from many other towns turned out to see this wonderful event. Of course earlier in the day we always celebrated with a covered dish supper. Uncle Joe Rohlena would invite us down to his home in Fairfax. He had bought his own fireworks. We enjoyed a double whammy for 2 days. Aunt Alyce was the best hostess. We had fun times because people made up their own ideas to entertain.

Iowa had hot, humid summer days. Our family would go outside (no air conditioning or fans then) to look at the stars. Pop was knowledgeable about some of them. He taught us to appreciate the heavens. We imagined that in the moon above us we saw a man & would say, 'I saw the man in the moon'! When we became bored with that we would leg wrestle. Pop always beat us but I was strong & gave him a run for his money!

Every May 1, mom encouraged us to create May baskets, fill them with flowers. When done walk to our nearest neighbors & hang them on their home's doorknobs. It was a welcome spring gesture! Later in the month families always spent Memorial Day at the gravesites of their loved ones. A parade would be held in Iowa City, also, & we'd be there to watch it. We decorated & cleaned our loved ones graves. Then, it was a big event. Today it's a shopping day for working people. Times have changed!

Gregg & I were chickens at heart when it came to taking chances. June was always the challenger. When she was quite young & we were living on Route 1—the farm, Pop bet each of us we couldn't stand on a certain fence post with one leg without falling off. Gregg & I knew we couldn't do it. Pop's bet was large (forgot the sum) but June challenged him. She climbed up there & did the task. She hasn't forgiven him to this day for not paying her that tidy sum! In fact he couldn't have paid her – no money!

Sis, I guess was a bit foolhardy at times. The spring rains had swollen the creek, in the fields across the road. June, Gregg & I followed along it watching its brisk flow until we came to the deepest section. I wasn't looking, but June tumbled in (whether falling, or she's tempting her luck). The water was deep, well over her head, once in. It was swirling like a whirlpool around her little body. The situation was critical. I jumped in & pulled her, & myself, out. Makey to her rescue again! We had another occasion when she fell through thin ice, by pushing her luck. She walked too far out on the thin ice & fell in. She managed trouble.



June & I would 'belly whop' together in the fields across from our home on a beautiful snowy day with our new sled that Joe & Alyce bought us one Christmas. They bought 3 – one each. This sled was the longest. June & used it all the time. The year was 1937. We appreciated their generosity. The sled brought us hours of fun!

Unfortunately it was spring thaw time again. We had a long, exciting sled ride down hill. I navigated the sled down the slope onto the ice covering the creek. We fell through the ice, soaking our clothes and our bodies. The walk back home to change our clothes was an experience—we were freezing. This was before the school bell rang. We had to rush to make it to school. Changing to dry clothing & explaining to mom what had happened, we rushed out the door to school! Sledding brought joy to the two of us!

Prior to Pop & mom's marriage our family was picnicking on the banks of the Iowa River. The river was low then. Pop invited me to ride on his shoulders to cross to the other side. I was game. All was fine until Pop reached the center of the river. Suddenly he fell into a deep hole. His head was underwater thus bringing mine under also. An 8- year- old kid like me thrashing around, was making it difficult for pop to hang onto me as I rode on his shoulders. He would jump up from under the water to take a quick breath until he finally walked himself out of that hole. We then finished our shallow walk across the river. We talked about it later. We almost drowned that day. That experience frightened me for years when I swam in the water. It took my late husband, Paul, to give me the courage to swim comfortably, without fears. He was a good swimmer.

Pop & mom often took us to the parks in Cedar Rapids to picnic. We kids met new friends & would enjoy playing in the kiddie pool there. The folks sat & waited for us wandering kids to return, enjoying their leisure time together. We picnicked in the Iowa City Park also. After pop wired our home with electricity mom invited our neighbors over evenings to play games—usually bingo. Pop had put up an outside yard light so we could sit at our picnic table to eat & play there. We kids later would run & play in the cornfields surrounding us. It was a way for us neighbors to get together to

enjoy one another. The eats were great too e.g. (Potluck suppers). Families supplied a covered dish for dinner. We usually had hot dogs when we celebrated. Potluck dinners were different. Those casserole dinners were full of chicken, pork, beef, etc.

In the fall my folks often would burn off last years crops & weeds. It was a controlled fire. Mom & pop had gone to town to shop. I decided I was going to follow their example. Luckily I was burning off the weeds near the road & not close to our house. Once begun, the winds whipped up, & started to spread my fire. Tried as I could, I was unable to stop it. It kept spreading along our embankment. Luckily for me the folks came home in time. Not until the fire had spread far though. The winds had died down & this helped the folks put the fire out. I have learned to respect fire. For thoughtless acts such as this one, pop would cut a keen switch from our young trees to switch me with. He rarely hit me. He was non-violent. When I needed a lesson, I got it so I would remember not to do it again. Sometimes I had to go to bed without my supper for punishment. I didn't mind that because I could relax & read one of my library books. I got a rest from chores besides.

Washday was Monday. Mom would heat a huge, copper, double boiler with water to boil our white clothes e.g., sheets, underwear, etc. Her next step was to scrub them on an old fashioned washboard, sitting in the water of a big round tin tub. She would rinse sheets, etc. in clear water. Then, hang them on the wash lines in the backyard. This was heavy work. Especially tough was when she wrung the sheets & clothing by hand. Later on, pop bought mom a motor driven Maytag washing machine with a wringer. Sure made her life much easier! I can remember winters' seeing our wet, long underwear, hanging on the lines supposedly to dry, but didn't, they were frozen stiff. Later on, they had to be brought inside our home to dry. Pop replaced several motors on that old washer & wringer. It served mom well!

Tuesday was ironing day. We had no polyesters then. Our cottons, wools & linens had to be ironed. I spent many hours ironing clothes for mom.

Once REA came through with electricity the folks purchased an electric stove. On Sundays mom would place a stew in the deep well slow cooker that was built in. Once home from church the fragrance was more than we could bear, wafting throughout the house. The smell was delicious! You can bet we scoffed that food away!

The Rollie Alt's were lifetime members of the Grace Methodist Church of North Liberty. Their ancestors prior to them, helped to found & support this Church down through the ages. Grandma Emma made the monthly communion wine for 50 or more years, when she was alive. This was an accomplishment! Each of their families was a early pioneer. Grandma's father was Dr. David Stewart. He was a doctor (surgeon) in the 1865 Civil War. Once the war was over, he returned to North Liberty to practice. Some folks couldn't pay him in sums of money for his services but would barter payment with him in exchange for one of their farm animals, or give some services to pay him, etc. He was popular. When I was young, my grandma Emma's sister was Aunt Winnie. She taught school in North Liberty. Her brother, Uncle Guy Stewart was the Justice of the Peace, etc. They were pillars in their community. Today, a street in Dr. Stewart's honor is in North Liberty is named after him. When I rode the train to high school from 1939 to 1943, I would get on the train at Stewart Station. Dr. Stewart's influence helped our community. He influenced others to send the train through North Liberty from Cedar Rapids to Iowa City, Iowa. The powers 'that be' listened to him! My half-brother, John, has Dr. Stewart's ledger from years ago. (Of his doctor appointments & the sums billed & were paid & unpaid). This ledger from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century is interesting! A bound, hard cover book has been written about the Alt & Stewart families of which I own one. The Alts' were of Swiss German decent & the Stewarts, Scotch. It mentions all the relatives past & present.

We enjoyed many wonderful Christmas holidays with our family. This particular occasion was perhaps in 1936 after Agda & Joe married. The Thanksgiving dinner before we each drew a name from a hat. This was our secret pal we were to give a gift to at Christmas. We planned our gift for that special person.



When we arrived at the Alt's house for dinner the living room door was closed. Agda took our special gifts & placed them each under their Christmas tree. She slipped quietly through the closed door into the living room. Try as we may we couldn't view beyond them. Christmas dinners were always delightful. They were fit for a king! Back in those days our folks would sit a long time at the table discussing everything & anything to pass the time. Perhaps they would fill their plates again, etc. We youngsters could not leave the table until we asked to be excused. When we were given permission, we would go outdoors to play. This Christmas was special. Our anxiety had grown & we 3 wanted to view our gifts under the tree.

At last Agda & Joe entered the room. They were there awhile. Finally the door was flung open. To our amazement there stood the most beautiful Christmas tree, glowing with candlelights. The tree was beautiful! She was tall & full, with bright colored ornaments hanging from her limbs. What a thrilling sight! That was the beginning of a wonderful afternoon. The gift exchange took second place to our amazement in seeing that beautiful tree. It was my best Christmas remembrance away from our own home.

Agda made little Christmas stockings for the table with a few candies in them. I was impressed with the gingerbread house she had made to celebrate the holidays, also! I bet she won't remember this event. She was young & full of energy. She created her dishes & creations full of love always! Today Agda is 89 years old. She & Joe raised 5 children, three boys & two girls.

Uncle Joe's contribution to our fun was to hitch up his team of horses, with bells jingling on them, as the horses trotted along with all of us aboard, standing & riding in his wagon. The horses would pace themselves trotting along through our back roads & fields. The wagon slid along on ski runners. It was such a smooth ride. We would sing & laugh. We sang Christmas carols celebrating the birth of baby Jesus. What a joyous time!

Being a Methodist Church member June, Gregg & I were members of the MYF (Methodist Youth Fellowship). It was customary at Christmas to go caroling throughout our small town of North Liberty. The retirees enjoyed us. Many times we were offered hot chocolate & cookies from them. They looked forward to our visits each year! The Church planned many activities for we teenagers. Often our activities were written up in the Iowa City Press Citizen newspaper.

We 3 kids also belong to 4-H, an organization for farm kids to show off their farm animals, their sewing or cooking skills, arts & crafts, etc. Its purpose was to build character & skills in young kids.

Our organization met once per month. Mrs. White Larew & Mrs. Irma Novak were our leaders. Perhaps a dozen girls attended our meetings as we moved from farm home to farm home each month. One month we would learn cooking and another we'd learn sewing. Once we sewed infant's nightgowns for the Red Cross. We were always doing interesting things through 4-H.

One year I was sent to Chicago to attend a meeting held each year. I represented our group (citizenship). The trip had special meaning to me & for those who thought I should attend. I can't remember a thing about the meeting. What I did remember there was being in a huge department store & riding on the escalator. I was such a 'green horn' I had never seen one. I felt the experience great with that memory! Many years later I worked 18 years for Rutgers University's Cook Colleges' Agricultural Department. Within it were 4-H, horticulture, home economics, lawn & tree care, insect identification & control, & diseases of plants & lawns. I felt at home & familiar with much of this business.

I won a blue ribbon in the Johnson County Fair with my cornbread when I was a 4-H member. I was, so I thought, an expert caring for our chickens. I was Dr. Maxine. I would take bandages & Vaseline to the barnyard & seeing a problem with one of our leghorns I would capture it & wrap it with bandages. I soon realized the damage I had

done. On one pullet I had bandaged its sore toe. After walking in dung each day that bandaged toe became hard as cement. The poor chicken could hardly walk. On one old hen patient of mine, chickens pecked her head open. I put Vaseline on her open wound. How terrible! It wasn't long before they killed her. I thought Dr. Mackey was helping her. I soon hung up my shingle & retired from that job.

Once mother returned from Church with us only to discover a big rat had entered her chicken house to mangle & eat her brooder baby chicks. She had just purchased them. She was distraught with anger & sad because she would have to start over with her baby chicks. After the chicken house was repaired she then bought another batch, (another experience for her). Hail, the size of golf balls, fell with the rain one day, & killed much of her chicken stock. Farm life can be disappointing. You work hard & things can be destroyed overnight.

Saturday nights the whole family would look forward to traveling to Iowa City to shop. We would all pile in the car, take off, & when we arrived there we would park in a spot where we could view our neighbors & friends passing by. Often the folks just sat in the car & waited to spy a friend, or neighbor, to visit with at their leisure.

Our young brother John brought us much joy when he arrived in 1938. Pop was proud of him. He thought we would harm him if we touched him. I think he was 3 months old before he would let us. We kids adored him & wanted to care for him. We taught him, as he grew, little verses. He would stand on the steps leading upstairs & recite them. He was adorable to us. We were proud to show him off. Of course, that would be when we were home from school. He was usually home alone with mom on the farm, up to 4 or 5 years. We truly became cemented as a family once John arrived. We kids had forgotten about our natal father. He was living in Arizona & had remarried. He had had a son that same year, named after him, too. He was James Harris. Our dad's 2<sup>nd</sup> wife was Mexican, Frieda Ruiz. He left her, or vice/versa, 6 or 7 years later, & little Jim had no daddy to depend on either. Luckily Frieda remarried again. Jim lives in San Diego. He & his wife Estele each brought children to their marriage. Jimmy had lost his



young wife in her 20s. He was left with 3 children to care for. Estele brought 2 kids & together they had 2 more. They are grown & today they have many grandchildren & great grandkids. We keep in touch at Christmas. I also keep in touch with Harrison's stepdaughter, Carole, from his third marriage to Emma Alstrop. Emma originally was from Denmark. Her family & Carole's are Mormons.

The years flew by & it is 1939 & here I am graduating from 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I am leaving my home away from home during my weekdays at school. I am thankful for the support of Mrs. Maine. She had to take me to the woodshed a couple of times when I became obnoxious. I still loved her. Many folks influenced us 3 as we grew in that little community. We were blessed today to have come from there. I have many Iowa friends from my childhood that keep in touch with me as I write. In 6 years, under Pops wing & his & our own loving family, I left that rebel behind. I had security & knew I was wanted & needed. Come Fall I had to take the train into Iowa City to the public school. It was located on the other side of the city & a long walk. My sophomore year I transferred to the University of Iowa's high school –U High! Mother felt June should go with me so June did not graduate from our 1-room-country school. She started 8<sup>th</sup> grade in U-High.

U High was a school for the privileged. Children were there whose parents paid high tuition from kindergarten on through high school. Most of their families were professionals. When we country kids arrived we were given the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree. If we didn't fit in we had to find our own groups. Mine were other greenhorns like me from the sticks. We weren't dumb—just poor. You couldn't get in U High unless you passed an entrance test. Those gals are still my buddies, although they live in Iowa City & thereabouts in that region. It was another small school. I think 47 classmates graduated from our class.

I loved sports. I played hard at volleyball, baseball, swimming, basketball, table tennis, etc. I won a U High letter for my efforts when I graduated. I was also in orchestra. I would say I was a struggling double bass player. Eventually I couldn't keep

up & gave up orchestra... I did take more lessons afterwards. I was also in sextet. We were a group of 6 girl singers. We sang often at events. I loved singing in mixed chorus. I was in a couple of high school plays, etc. I brought these experiences with me into my real world once I graduated in 1943 more than I realized. Our plans were to leave Iowa for California to get good paying war work. WW # 2 had begun & Americans started to move towards war work. Iowa's salaries were poor.. Pop had spent 2 winters, working elsewhere, as an electrician -Minnesota & Texas. Mom determined not to be left alone by Pop, handling our family & its problems alone, again. We closed up the farm, sold its furniture & livestock & rented it. We were leaving all our loved ones & friends behind. It was an exciting experience but a sad one too. We never returned to Iowa to live. Now we were embracing new experiences. Our futures were ahead of us!